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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: The President's Meeting with Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin of the Soviet Union (S)

PARTICIPANTS: Secretary George P. Shultz
Donald T. Regan
John M. Poindexter
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Donald R. Fortier
Jack F. Matlock

SOVIET

Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin
Deputy Minister Aleksandr Bessmertnykh
Soviet DCM Oleg Sokolov

DATE, TIME TUESDAY, APRIL 8, 1986
AND PLACE: 09:45 - 11:00 a.m., Oval Office

The President opened the meeting by congratulating Dobrynin on his election as Secretary of the Central Committee, and pointing out that he was eager to move forward along the lines agreed at the Geneva Summit. He noted that we had made some progress, especially in bilateral areas, and said that he was particularly encouraged by the Soviet Government's receptiveness to discussing an expansion of people-to-people programs. Charlie Wick, he observed, had informed him of his good reception during his trip. (C)

However, the President added, he was disappointed by the overall lack of progress in our relations, and was aware that much remains to be done. He then invited Dobrynin's comments. (S)

Dobrynin began by thanking the President for the cooperation he had received during his tenure in Washington, and mentioned that his new duties would involve supervision of the Central Committee's International Department, which would include in the future U.S.-Soviet relations. (C)

He also brought personal greetings from Gorbachev, and mentioned that he had delivered a letter from Gorbachev to Secretary Shultz yesterday. He hoped that there would be a reply soon, and

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suggested that it would be nice if he could carry one back to the General Secretary. He had had a good talk with Secretary Shultz and Admiral Poindexter yesterday, and wondered if the President had any reaction to Gorbachev's letter. (S)

The President said that he would speak frankly. As he had noted, progress in our relations had not been what he had hoped after Geneva. Soviet military involvement in regional conflicts creates major problems in our relations, and furthermore is dangerous. He and Gorbachev bear a great responsibility: they hold the fate of the world in their hands, and such involvement increases dangers. (S)

Libya is a prime example, the President continued. It is hard for the U.S. to accept Soviet criticism of our maneuvers in international waters, since we both agree that the Gulf of Sidra is international. The U.S. has operated there many times, the recent maneuvers were scheduled well in advance, and were not intended to be provocative. Therefore, the Soviet stance could not be understood here. (S)

The U.S. seeks solutions to these regional problems -- but as long as our friends need help, we will give it. He had studied Gorbachev's remarks on Afghanistan at the Party Congress, and wished to say that the U.S. has no desire to keep Afghanistan a "bleeding wound." Soviet escalation has done that. (S)

Regarding arms control, he sees potential progress in some areas, but is frustrated by a lack of Soviet response to the U.S. proposals. For example, there has been no answer yet to our November 1 proposal on strategic arms reduction. In this respect, we may have different approaches to negotiation. Our approach is for each side to present its optimum desires, and then to narrow the differences through negotiation when the differences in approach are clear. (S)

As for nuclear testing, he regrets Soviet efforts to make propaganda on the issue. The U.S. has made numerous efforts to make progress, but it must be understood that the U.S. is behind the Soviet Union in carrying out its testing program. A moratorium when one side has completed its program and the other is still in the middle of its program is unacceptable. Our priority goal is agreement on concrete verification improvements for the two treaties which have been signed. It is important to take steps to build confidence, since there is too much distrust on both sides to agree immediately to major changes. As he had told the General Secretary in Geneva, nations don't distrust each other because they are armed; they arm themselves because they distrust each other. We are ready to have our experts meet for bilateral talks without preconditions, and they can deal with the concerns of both sides. We see no reason why this dialogue could not produce concrete results at the next summit. (S)

69

- 3 -

~~SECRET/SENSITIVE~~

Regarding the next summit, the President stressed that we want a substantive outcome. He then listed the following as optimum goals:

- Agreement on key elements of a treaty reducing strategic weapons in comparable categories by 50%.
- Agreement on key elements of an INF treaty.
- Agreement on methods which eliminate both the threat of an effective first strike by either side and the use of space for basing offensive weapons capable of mass destruction.
- Agreement on more reliable means to verify nuclear tests and commitment to create conditions which would permit the ultimate elimination of testing. If we could make progress toward reducing nuclear weapons, that would provide a basis for further limitations on testing.
- Agreement on chemical weapons ban.
- Progress in bringing peace to regions now torn by conflict.
- Improvements in the political atmosphere to permit major expansion of trade and cooperation. (S)

The President then pointed out that agreements on key elements in 1986 would permit negotiation of treaties in time for meeting planned for 1987 - which in turn would make ratification possible before the U.S. 1988 election campaign. Such agreements would represent a blueprint for realizing the first phase of General Secretary Gorbachev's January 15 proposal. (S)

He then noted that other important issues require attention: conventional force reductions in Central Europe and more effective confidence-building measures, and said that even if they could not achieve all these optimum goals, substantial progress in some of these areas would be a worthwhile achievement. But we are ready to work constructively on all of them. (S)

The President then concluded his presentation by asking Dobrynin to tell Gorbachev that he very much is looking forward to his visit to the United States. He hopes the General Secretary can stay here for at least a week, since he would like to show him something of the United States. The visit should not be all work, although there will be plenty of time for working sessions. But he would like to hear Mr. Gorbachev's desires on this score. (S)

Dobrynin began his response by commenting that they are not trying to avoid a discussion of regional conflicts. There will be further opportunity when the foreign ministers meet. Our views, of course, differ, but we can discuss this. (S)

44

~~SECRET/SENSITIVE~~

As for Afghanistan, U.S. involvement prolongs the war, which is what Gorbachev was referring to in his Party Congress speech. The issue of local conflicts is on their minds, however. Foreign Minister Shevardnadze will be willing to take up three or four of the most important and discuss them in more detail with Secretary Shultz. The Soviets have made good proposals to Pakistan on Afghanistan, and have even set forth a schedule for troop withdrawal. The situation around Libya also bothers them very much, and that is true also of Nicaragua, but he would not take time now to discuss it. We can go into these issues more thoroughly on other occasions. (S)

Regarding the central security issues, the Soviets want something substantial to come out of the next summit. We need to find a minimum number of issues to try to solve. Diplomats must do the negotiation, but they need instructions from the top. Some recent U.S. actions have introduced uncertainty on the Soviet side. (S)

For example, they are concerned regarding the U.S. position on a nuclear test ban. They are willing to discuss verification, but why not discuss a test ban and verification simultaneously? We could either resume the tripartite talks with the UK, or just open bilateral talks on the subject. (S)

Secretary Shultz asked if he was proposing this as one of the summit announcements. (S)

Dobrynin said yes, and asked what would be wrong with an announcement that negotiation on U.S. and Soviet ideas would be resumed. (S)

The President noted that there is no agreement yet on the time for his next meeting with Gorbachev. (S)

Dobrynin said that this is precisely the point. Although there are no preconditions, they do not want our leaders going blindfolded into a meeting. History has shown that such meetings are not successful. For example, Kennedy met Khrushchev without preparation in Vienna and it was a flop. The same is true of Eisenhower's meeting with Khrushchev in Paris. On the other hand, the summits that Nixon, Ford and Carter had with Brezhnev, and that the President had with Gorbachev in Geneva were well prepared and were successful. (S)

We need to know what minimum will be achieved, he continued. We cannot risk failure at the top level. Gorbachev wants success just as he feels the President wants success, and he is setting no preconditions, but he is asking specifically what areas we can reach agreement on. (S)

Dobrynin pointed out that the Soviets are familiar with the three broad areas of our relations, security, regional conflict and bilateral, and are willing to work on all of them. We began to prepare well before the Geneva summit last year, and although we stopped for a while, these preparations permitted the staff to work out the joint statement the last night. This would not have been possible without the prior work. But the joint statement was a good one and had an impact on public opinion. (S)

Now five months have passed, and what do we have that we can announce at the next meeting? That is, if there is a meeting this year -- and Gorbachev assumes there will be one. We have no clearcut minimum goal. (S)

So Gorbachev's main message is: Let's sit down and find at least the minimum. We can work on the proposals of both to define the minimum. When Nixon came to the Soviet Union in 1972 he had 80 percent of the results in his pocket. It is dangerous to go into these meetings entirely ex promptu. We have presented some ideas; you may have other ideas. This is not to substitute for the work at the meeting itself, but rather to insure that it is successful. (S)

The President said that we had in fact proposed a number of things, and observed that we may look at negotiations from different viewpoints. He recalled that for 25 years he had been chief negotiator for his labor union, the Screen Actors' Guild. In those negotiations, the union would make a proposal, and management would make a proposal, and that way they came to understand the differences between them which had to be negotiated. (S)

Regarding INF, we seem close to agreement. We agree that we should go down to zero. We do disagree on how to apply this globally. But we could bridge that at the next summit. (S)

As for START, we have agreed on a 50 percent reduction. We apply this to different systems. It is a complex question because of the types of weapons and the fact that each side has a different force structure. But we have come a long way in agreeing on a world without nuclear weapons. U.S. proposals have been presented in response to Soviet proposals, and if our negotiators are freed up so they can discuss the differences, we might hammer out an agreement on the remaining issues at the next summit. If we could do that, our public would clap their hands, since they fear the nuclear threat and want to have it eliminated. (S)

As for agreements at earlier summits, some of these seem to have been reached just for the sake of agreement. There have been some violations of them, which is evidence of this. Therefore the President said he is not impressed by what had been achieved at these earlier meetings. Previous agreements merely agreed on the pace of an increase, not on reductions. But he wondered what

is keeping us from settling how we do the 50 percent reductions to which we have agreed. (S)

Dobrynin said that what the Soviets are trying to do is to find a way for the leaders to give instructions to our negotiators to narrow the differences. Negotiations will continue in the various fora, but our Foreign Ministers should sit down and see what goals would be realistic. We need something for our bosses to sign or announce. Then they will have some birds in hand as they go into their meeting, and can see how much more they can get during the meeting. (S)

For example, a simple announcement that they agree to begin negotiations on a [comprehensive] test ban and verification of testing is one possibility. Or, as regards SDI, an announcement that we will begin talks on how to strengthen the ABM Treaty. The point is that we need some definition of the minimum which can be achieved or announced. (S)

Dobrynin then observed that Gorbachev, like the President, is a politician, and just cannot risk coming home from the summit without some definable result. He observed that when the President meets with his Allies, he always has something in mind in advance. This is also a good rule to follow with others. That way, formal negotiations can go forward, but at the same time we can reach an understanding on what the minimum results will be. (S)

Dobrynin then pulled out a paper in Russian and translated what he characterized as an "oral message" from Gorbachev, remarking that it had been given to him when he saw Gorbachev the day before his departure from Moscow. It contained the following points:

-- Gorbachev is committed to pursuing the obligation he and the President assumed in Geneva to work toward an improvement of the international situation.

-- Since Geneva, the actions of the USSR have been designed to achieve the aims agreed at the summit. These have been consistent with preparing for the next meeting, agreed to at Geneva.

-- He, Gorbachev, is prepared to be guided by the mutual agreements undertaken at the Geneva Summit.

-- U.S. actions, however, leave a different impression. Rhetoric has intensified. Certain U.S. steps can be interpreted as unfriendly acts, directed against the improvement of relations. And all this has happened while there was no dialogue between the US and USSR regarding plans for the next summit meeting.

-- He is trying to understand what the U.S. wishes to achieve. He took note of Secretary Shultz's statement to Ryzhkov that the President is committed to an improvement in relations.

-- The main thing is to insure the success of the next Summit meeting. We need an understanding on what specific results can be counted on.

-- He wishes to invite the President's personal attention to this problem. When matters of such importance are involved, extemporaneous actions and meetings can be dangerous. Khrushchev's meeting with Kennedy in Vienna, which proceeded on such an "extemporaneous" basis, aggravated relations.

-- He is not making an attempt to impose preconditions for the summit meeting. Rather, his desire is to agree in advance on the possible content of the meeting -- what we each will be bringing to the meeting and what we hope to achieve. Specifically, what agreements or understandings, as a minimum, will be the result?

-- He believes that every opportunity should be taken to prepare a productive meeting so he can visit the United States this year. But he wants that meeting to be meaningful and substantial. (S)

Having read these points, Dobrynin observed that our Foreign Ministers would be meeting in May. [Secretary Shultz observed, "May 14-16."] Dobrynin then summed up his presentation by saying that his main message is that we should try together to clarify what the positive results of the next summit will be, and that Gorbachev hopes to see the President in this country this year. (S)

Secretary Shultz said that he would like to repeat what the President had already said, so that it would be clearly understood. (S)

First, we want a meeting associated with progress in reaching accords. (S)

Second, we know the only way is to work on the subject matter ahead of time. We must know 80-90% of what we have in hand before the meeting. It is therefore good that his meeting with Shevardnadze has been scheduled. (S)

Third, they should look carefully at what the President has said regarding potential areas for agreement. He will go through them with Dobrynin later this week, but he wanted to emphasize their importance now. [Note: A written text of the President's "optimum goals" was given to Dobrynin's staff later, and Secretary Shultz reviewed them again with Dobrynin at his April 9 meeting.] (S)

47

~~SECRET/SENSITIVE~~

The President observed that both sides have now made similar statements. They have made proposals, and we have answered them. We accepted some of the Soviet ideas, and made some of our own. But we have no response. (S)

However, both of us have expressed a desire to achieve the same goal. He understands the point that both he and Gorbachev are politicians, and that a political leader cannot be pushed into a corner. This holds true on both sides. (S)

If he and the General Secretary get together and come to an agreement, some elements will be from the proposals of one side and some elements from those of the other. That way each can say afterward what he obtained in terms of his own proposals. (S)

The President then said that he wanted to mention another subject -- human rights. He has no desire to push the General Secretary into a corner on this issue. He noted that he had discussed it previously with Dobrynin, and emphasized that he was not pushing for an agreement as such. However, this is one area where, if the Soviet Union takes some actions, it will make it possible for him, the President, to do some things that both want. (S)

The President added that one out of ten Americans has relatives or ancestors in the Soviet Union. They are emotional about what happens there. If positive action is taken, he will never open his mouth to say that we suggested it. But it will be easier for him to say that he had agreed to this or that with the Soviet Union. Therefore, he hoped that we would see more progress in this area. (S)

Regarding arms control, testing and the like, he felt that we have enough areas to work on. We use the same figures as our basis for negotiation. But if the General Secretary proposes one date as a goal for something and we propose an earlier one, that is not the sort of issue where one side "caves in" if it agrees with the other. Rather it would be a compromise. (S)

The President then wondered if we have the same understanding of the word "compromise." We seem to look at it in different ways. (S)

Dobrynin stated that "compromise" means the same in both languages, and that Gorbachev is in favor of compromise. He knows there must be compromise on security issues. (S)

As for dates when things can be accomplished, Gorbachev had mentioned some in his January 15 proposal. If the U.S. wants to speed them up, that is all right with Gorbachev. (S)

Regarding the U.S. November 1 proposal, this was made before the Geneva summit. Gorbachev's January 15 proposal was based on the discussion at Geneva and took the November 1 proposal and the

~~SECRET/SENSITIVE~~ 41
discussions at the summit in Geneva into account. We must look at the situation now and find a way out. (S)

Regarding medium-range missiles [i.e., INF], the Soviets have made major concessions. They have agreed that there could be a separate agreement, that the SS-20's could be eliminated in Europe, that deactivated missiles would be destroyed and not just moved, and have even compromised on the role of British and French systems in any agreement. It is natural that they would insist on a non-transfer provision, so that the agreement could not be circumvented, but the U.S. has said no to this. Secretary Shultz has said that this topic may be an area for a "minimum" achievement at the next summit, but he is not sure we are close enough. (S)

Dobrynin continued by saying that there may be other subjects which could be agreed upon. The 50 percent reductions, for example, but we still have the critical problem of how we define the "content" of the reduction. (S)

Dobrynin then asked if he could say that the U.S. is in favor of activating the negotiating process and simultaneously thinking about what results can be anticipated from the next summit? (S)

The President agreed and Secretary Shultz noted that the President has gone farther than suggesting goals for 1986. He has pointed out that if we are to have a successful meeting in 1987 as well as 1986, we must begin preparations now. That means working on a solution in the strategic arms area. (S)

Dobrynin said that we should hope that the two foreign ministers can get a clearer picture of the prospects for the 1986 meeting. (S)

Secretary Shultz pointed out that Dobrynin would be here until Friday evening, and that we would be pursuing discussion of these matters with him and with Deputy Minister Bessmertnykh. He then asked if there is agreement on Shevardnadze's visit to the United States. (S)

Dobrynin confirmed that there is, and Secretary Shultz suggested that by Friday they would try to sum up just where things stand at present. (S)

The President noted that we still need a date for Gorbachev's visit. The Soviets are aware of our problem in the fall -- the election campaign -- and it is not desirable to have the visit at that time. (S)

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Dobrynin assured the President that Gorbachev has no desire to be involved in any way in domestic U.S. politics, and understood that a visit during the Congressional campaign would not be a good idea. (S)

The meeting ended about 10:50; Dobrynin stayed for a few minutes with the President after the others had left the room. (C)

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